Attracting and Retaining Young Professionals

Results from Focus Groups
Final Report

Presented by: Fountainworks

Background and Purpose

3 out of 4 young people under the age of 28 first pick a place to live, and then find a job – From a Study by *Next Generation Consulting*

Background and Purpose

This project was a partnership between the Rowan County Chamber of Commerce, the City of Salisbury and Downtown Salisbury, Inc.

PURPOSE: To gather ideas around how to attract and retain young professionals.

Three focus groups were held:
1) Young professionals who work in Salisbury but live in another community in the region.
2) Young professionals who live and work in Salisbury.
3) Area college students.

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Project Learning Objectives

- To understand what young professionals value and what matters most as they think about a community where they want to live and work.

- To understand the amenities that attract young professionals so the community can develop these amenities.

- To develop ideas to help businesses market to young professionals and college students.

Focus Areas

- **Earning:** Employment and earning opportunities for young professionals
- **Social Capital:** Diversity and tolerance (a community's inclusion and tolerance of all kinds of people)
- **Around Town:** Ease of getting to and around town
- **Cost of Lifestyle:** Affordability and cost of living
- **Vitality:** A "healthy community" where people are active. It includes recreational amenities
- **After Hours:** Things to do after 5PM
- **Downtown Housing:** Housing in and around downtown Salisbury

Employment and Earning Opportunities

		Earning		
Available in Salisbury	High	0	0	0
	Medium	0	1	6
	Low	1	1	15
		Importance		
		Low	Medium	High

Earning was among the most important of all focus areas and Salisbury scored low in this category.

Comment: "I was fortunate to find a good job here. My friends would move here if they could find jobs."

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Social Capital: Diversity and Tolerance

		Social Capital		
Available in Salisbury	High	1	0	1
	Medium	1	6	7
	Low	0	3	4
		Importance		
		Low	Medium	High

Social capital rated as an important focus area and relates closely to the overall theme that young professionals want to feel comfortable and connected.

Comment: Salisbury: a friendly and welcoming community – "People don't talk to you in Altadena, California where I come from."

Comment: It can be difficult for outsiders not from the South to quickly feel welcome.

Around Town: Ease of Getting to and around Town

		Around Town		
Available in Salisbury	High	0	9	0
	Medium	6	3	0
	Low	2	3	1
		Importance		
		Low	Medium	High

'Around town' not ranked as important as other areas (likely because Salisbury does not have a traffic problem).

Salisbury rated highly on ease of getting to and around town.

Those who rated it poorly specifically cited public transportation as their reason.

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Cost of Lifestyle: Affordability and Cost of Living

		Cost of Living		
Available in Salisbury	High	0	1	14
	Medium	0	5	0
	Low	1	1	2
		Importance		
		Low	Medium	High

Salisbury scored very well on low cost of living, and young professionals said this was very important.

Those who live and work in Salisbury cared most about this issue. They all gave the city the highest ranking for cost of living and all said this was very important to them.

They defined affordable housing as $125,000 to $200,000 range (affordable housing is also commonly defined as less than 30% of monthly household income).

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Vitality: A Healthy Community

		Vitality		
Available in Salisbury	High	0	4	2
	Medium	0	2	12
	Low	0	1	3
		Importance		
		Low	Medium	High

Vitality is also one of the most important focus areas for young and emerging professionals.

Young professionals who live and work in Salisbury rated the availability of these amenities higher than average.

Those who did not live in Salisbury were less aware of some of the amenities and rated Salisbury lower.

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After Hours: Things to Do after 5PM

		After Hours		
Available in Salisbury	High	0	0	0
	Medium	0	1	0
	Low	1	16	6
		Importance		
		Low	Medium	High

All groups ranked Salisbury poorly.

Young professionals considered it to be moderate importance. College students considered it to be moderate to high importance.

All expressed interest in amenities that provide social outlets and opportunities for young people to connect with one another. Walkability was important.

Suggestions ranged from coffee houses to sports bars to ethnic restaurants to social dancing clubs.

Downtown Housing:
Housing in and around Downtown Salisbury

		Downtown Housing		
Available in Salisbury	High	0	0	0
	Medium	1	1	0
	Low	17	4	1
		Importance		
		Low	Medium	High

This was considered the least important and least available among the options.

Participants said downtown housing would be best for young professionals before they started families.

Safety was a key issue.

Downtown housing is more attractive when the downtown has more to offer.

Interested in schools.

Key Findings

1. Salisbury has important amenities that young professionals care about.

•Affordability, ease of getting around, safety, friendly people, recreational amenities, and proximity to Charlotte as well as the beach and mountains.

2. Lack of job opportunities and 'things to do' were key drawbacks of Salisbury.

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Key Findings

3. Young professionals want to feel "connected" (They don't want to feel isolated).

They want social and professional outlets and opportunities to connect with other young professionals in the community. They suggest that employers can play an important role in this area.

4. Young professionals embrace cultural diversity. They embrace cultural diversity

Among citizens, in restaurants, in retail, in community events, and even in foods at the farmers market.

Key Findings

5. Many of Salisbury's amenities are not known
An opportunity to market and advertise to this population.

6. Walkability and convenience.

7. Outdoor and recreational amenities are important.

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Top Rated Amenities and Things to Do

- Outdoor events, particularly after-hours music outside (*Live After 5 event*)
- Cultural events
- Good shopping and retail – trendy stores and chains.
- Gyms
- Clubs – social gathering places were preferred over nightclubs
- Restaurants – including upscale, themed and ethnic.
- Open air fairs
- Coffee shops and internet cafes
- "Playgrounds" for adults (Dave and Busters or Celebration Station)
- For young professionals with families: a place to take children – events, churches, YMCA

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Reaching Out to Young Professionals

- **Young professionals and college students are unaware of all of the amenities, shops and events in the community.**

- **Some key ideas and observations for businesses, the Chamber and its partners include:**

    — **Marketing ("There are a lot of things to do," "Play in Salisbury")**

    — **Advertise community events so they know about 'things to do.' Create one location that makes it easy to access the information on what Salisbury has to offer (i.e. Visitors Center). Websites should be categorized and easy to navigate.**

Reaching Out to Young Professionals

- **Expand hours and advertise expanded hours. Young professionals voiced frustration that Salisbury closes up at night. They want businesses that offer expanded evening hours.**

    — **Provide coupons and discounts online**
    — **Sponsor events—restaurants could hold events like shagging or salsa dancing**
    — **Promote nightly specials— 'free appetizer night'**
    — **Mailers**
    — **Build email databases and send email blasts**

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Other Ideas

• **Important to support entrepreneurial activities (i.e. business incubator)**

•**Recruit boomerangs (Best prospects already know your city)**

•**Engage young professionals to serve on boards and commissions**

•**Employers pay for membership fees and professional development**

•**Support organizations and causes of young professionals**

•**Match college students with employers. Establish a liaison/ cmte**

•**Branding campaign will be an important opportunity**

•**Engage the community in this conversation**

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